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GAY BROADWAY

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Mirtie's eyes darted to the man on the bridge.

The Great Myrtilla

By BARNABY IVES

MIRTIE swung her bare leg while she viewed a runner with alarm and anger. It was bad enough to be stranded in a small seaport town and flat broke, without having runners come in your last pair of hose.

"That's too-too," she decided, stamping on the offending stocking.

"Yessum, it must be very serious," a solemn voice agreed.

Mirtie looked up and her brows knit as a solemn faced man appeared in the doorway. "Well, what do you want?" she demanded, ruffling curly yellow hair until it looked all the more like a French doll's wig.

"Mr. Allan Stressley needs a lady to help him out of a very bad hole. I am Mr. Stressley's secretary. He heard that a troupe was stranded here and that the leading lady was very beautiful so he sent me over from his yacht to see if you would like to earn five hundred dollars, miss."

"Does a cat like fish?" Mirtie asked

sarcastically. "But what does one do to earn half a grand?"

"It is like this, miss. There's a lodge visiting here and Mr. Stressley was asked to entertain a party of them. Then he was called away on business so left it to me to find out if you would serve. You see he had wired the actress, Myrtilla Lane, to be a guest, and had told these gentlemen in his letter to them that Miss Lane would be present. Miss Lane declined and now he needs someone who will pretend to be this great actress for the one night and day. The party is to be on his yacht and he assured me, miss, there would be no passes made at you if you'd come. All you have to do is just be there for them to look at."

Mirtie picked up her stocking and studied it. "Okay, brother, I'll be there, providing there's an advance so I can get my trunk out of hock at the hotel. You see the company lit out in the night, leaving little Mirtie holding the bag."

The secretary looked blank, then blinked because Mirtie's swinging leg was showing a great deal of white thigh and there was a fascinating crescent mole above the garter line (if she had worn hose) and his eyes kept going back to it.

Mirtie watched him away after they had completed their plans, then dove into her trunk for a picture. She propped it up and went to work with comb and pins. It was the picture of a very lovely actress with rows of soft yellow curls piled on top of her head.

"Good thing I have clothes," she muttered, calling down for the manager. She paid her bill with great aplomb, ordered her bags taken down and prepared to become the great Myrtilla.

THE SEA GHOST was a palatial yacht at anchor in the next port and Mirtie was ushered on board with great ado just about the time they were due to cast off. Not one of the half dozen visiting lodgemen from the west, guessed that the gorgeous young creature in the ashes-of-raspberry silk suit, swinging fox furs and mad little hat cocked on the back of her bright curls, was not the great Mytilla straight from Broadway; the great actress as well as former dancer.

Over their salaaming heads Mirtie's big brown eyes darted to the tall man standing on the bridge with the captain. This would be the host, she decided, and he came down shortly and announced himself as such.

He had a nice, crisp voice and eyes as gray as the sea in winter and he was younger than she had expected.

"Your host, at your service," he announced crisply. "So you are the glamorous Myrtilla, and quite as glamorous as advertised. I hope you will have a happy time on board."

He didn't hope anything of the sort, Mirtie decided, watching him from under extravagant lashes. He looked as though, far back in his eyes, he hated actresses, and this was simply a sacrifice to the wishes of his guests.

Mirtie had made inquiries about Allan Stressley. He was new-rich and married, but his wife was summering in the north. He was madly in love with her and intensely jealous, "with cause", the villagers said piously.

Mirtie decided then and there, on seeing Allan Stressley in person, that she would change that look in his eyes to something much, much warmer. He was the first man she'd ever seen who had made her feel like that, and *that* was very warm and shivery indeed, every time he looked at her with those gray eyes of his.

THE GREAT YACHT moved majestically up the shore line and Mirtie, unpacking in her cabin, watched the water surge past the portholes for a moment, head busy with plans, then turned to answer a rap.

Her host strode in, then stopped, his eyes widening with involuntary admiration as quickly hidden.

Mirtie, in a delectable rose negligee, her body like a rounded white jade vase beneath, stood between him and the sunset-lighted portholes. As she came forward one graceful leg appeared from the negligee and he saw the crescent-shaped beauty mark vividly black against the white velvet skin.

"Of course I know you aren't the real Myrtilla," he said carelessly, sitting down on the arm of a chair with every intention of staying. "Jeremiah told me he found you in a third rate hotel, stranded. I had told him to do his best to round up a substitute. It seems he had seen your show and thought it rotten, but you excellent. You must have that certain something to attract Jeremiah, who is my idea of a stick done up in man's clothing."

Mirtie's eyes flashed. "I assure you I didn't see *him.*"

"No, I suppose there were more attractive men. Oh, don't flash your eyes! I've seen too many actresses in action to have any illusions. I am grateful to you for taking the place of the real Myrtilla, but I wanted to warn you you must do nothing that would disgrace her name."

Mirtie walked close to him, bringing a fragrance of rose-geranium bath salts and young girl flesh. "I think you are horrid! I won't hurt your old Myrtilla's name. I'll even dust it off before I return it, so there! Besides, I was named for her if they do call me Mirtie."

Allan put out a leisurely arm and circled her waist. "All right, all right, I just wanted you to understand that, while we may borrow her name, we won't hurt it any. She has an arms-off attitude and an excellent reputation."

MIRTIE STRAINED AWAY from him. "And you think I haven't?"

"Well, you came, didn't you? I told Jeremiah that no one except a third or fourth rate actress would accept such a position." He slid his fingers under her arm through the big sleeve of the negligee and clasped his fingers about her ribs.

"If we are to keep Myrtilla's name clean, don't you think you had better start it by getting out of here?" Mirtie asked, in blazing fury, because his palm against her side started a thousand pulses tingling.

"You'll do," he said, with a laugh that held a trace of excitement. "You see I was trying you out. You're an exciting little bundle of fragrant girlhood. How old are you?" making no attempt to release her.

"Eighteen—most," Mirtie said sullenly, longing to press close to Allan, and noticing the lean hard lines of his body revealed under the white flannels.

"And I suppose you were cradled in a dresser drawer in your mother's dressing room at the theatre," he drawled, making no move to release her.

"No, I wasn't! I ran away to act."

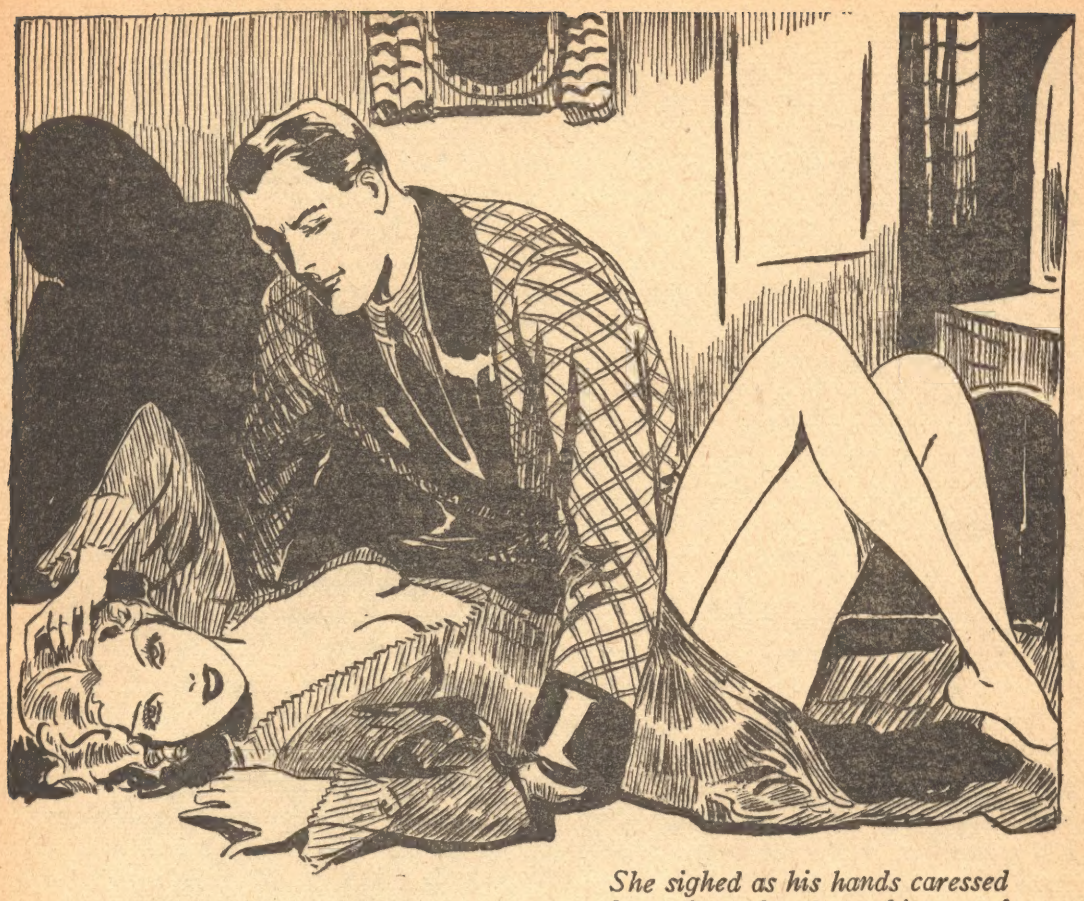
Allan looked down at her thoughtfully and discovered what Jeremiah had not, a witching maltese cross mole in the shadowy valley between two hard young mounds. His eyes flamed and Mirtie trembled in his grasp, wetting her pouting red lips with a slim flame of a tongue.

He shook her off and went to the door. "All right, we understand each other!" he said harshly, and was gone.

"So it got you too," Mirtie muttered sullenly, running her hands over her body to make sure it had all the delicious curves her mirror had told her about. "Your wife had better stay home, Mr. Allan Stressley."

DINNER WAS EXCITING. She sat beside Allan, and, in the confines of the dining room, stretched to its utmost with the visiting lodgemen and their wives or friends, her chair was so close to Allan's that his lean flank was pressed hard against her leg.

As everyone mellowed with the excellent liquors, Allan dropped his hand down to Mirtie's knee and found that the slit skirt had fallen away so all that hid the



She sighed as his hands caressed her through the whisper of georgette.

dimpled knee was the sheer chiffon hose his money had bought to replace the run hose.

Mirtie drew a stormy breath that threatened the frail strap and Allan's eyes warmed. Deliberately his fingers strayed beyond the jewelled garter top to the spot where the crescent moon mole decorated the white flesh. Mirtie was sure it was his intention to agitate her enough to break the strap holding up her gown and by now she was mad enough about him almost not to care.

"You're a darling, Mirtie, if you are an actress. I don't believe you've been around at all," whispered Allan, leaning close to her ear and adventuring farther. "You aren't a bit cold and you would be if you were a hardboiled little gold digger."

"You said," warned Mirtie, trembling under his caress, "that I was to do nothing—"

"You're safe with me. I was talking about those lodge fellows. I saw red from the minute you came on board, at the thought of one of them touching you."

Mirtie's eyes were burning as his held them, while they sent all sorts of audacious suggestions. Her cheeks grew scarlet and her lips parted in a gasp because she knew that almost anything he suggested, she'd do.

"So I dated this little leading lady of the 'Lazy Daisy' troupe," the only unattached lodgeman was boasting, "and was she a hot number! Boys! If you didn't have your wives along what I could tell you about her. She sure taught *me* things!"

The magic dissolved under the leering words and Mirtie half rose to call the boaster a liar, but Allan sank his fingers deep into her flesh and held her still in her chair. She'd bear the marks of his fingers for days, she knew, as she went faint with the pain of his grip.

A FROSTY SMILE CURVED his lips as he looked at the purple faced, perspiring lodgeman, *and believed him.*

"Mr. Stressley, Mrs. Stressley is on board. She came on board when we took on the flowers for Miss Myrtilla," Jeremiah anxiously breathed in Allan's ear.

"Thanks. I was hoping she'd come." He rose and left the room, a cruel smile curving his mouth.

Mirtie sank back in her chair, sick with jealousy. She could have proved to Allan, given time, that the lodgeman was a liar, but now she wouldn't have time. She remembered what the villagers had told her, that Allan Stressley was mad about his wife. All the things his ardent gray eyes had asked her for, would be his wife's.

"Violetta darling, meet the guests. You can pick out the names afterwards. Mrs. Stressley, ladies and gentlemen. Do come over and meet Miss Myrtilla, my dear." It was Allan in the doorway, and looking over his shoulder was a glamorous siren with sleek, blue-black hair worn in a low coil, long black eyes and wicked scarlet mouth. She wore satin the exact color of her skin so for an instant it seemed she stood there nude, then she moved into the saloon and greeted the guests, coming at last to Myrtilla.

"I've wanted to meet you for a long time," said Violetta Stressley. "My husband has been mad about you for ages."

Mirtie looked up at Allan and he gave her a warning look. So he hadn't told his wife that she was the wrong Myrtilla.

"Thank you. I am very fond of Allan," drawled Mirtie.

"I think I saw you dance in 'June Moon'. I hope you plan to dance for us," Violetta went on smoothly, but her lips drew back from her sharp, pointed teeth like those of a spiteful cat.

"You mean the dance I do with the balloons?" Mirtie asked composedly. "I'm afraid I haven't any with me."

"But we have plenty on board. We keep them for novelty dances. Come, Allan, let's go find them. Jeremiah will know." Violetta put her hand through Allan's arm and drew him out of the saloon.

Mirtie set her nails deep into her palms. She had done the baloon dance often but it was different on a stage than in a small place like this. Violetta knew it too. She wanted the actress to make a spectacle of herself because of Allan, who hated actresses and dancers. But he had been getting over it when she had come on board.

MIRTIE WENT TO HER CABIN. Surely Allan would veto the suggestion that she do the dance. It had been years, too, since the real Myrtilla had done the dance. She had risen to greater heights than a strip tease dance. Why, hadn't Mirtie said so? She'd been so astounded she hadn't been very bright, and it was too late now, unless Allan objected. He might.

A tap and Allan entered, carrying a great string of gay balloons. "Oh here you are," he said, smiling cruelly. "We've had the guests blowing lustily. There's plenty of good Scotch and rye breaths in these balloons."

"You mean you want me to do that dance in that small space?" Mirtie asked scornfully. "I thought you were different. You sat there and believed what that man said, when you know he didn't recognize me, though he sat right across the table. You aren't even bright. All right, I *will* do your dance. It will be a dance you'll all remember!"

Allan looked at her uncertainly but she pushed him out of the door and slammed it.

Hands shaking, she stripped off the lovely gown and dropped it in a heap. Of

little balloons she made herself a brassiere and tied it; of larger ones she made a skirt, and tied the rest about her wrists.

Jeremiah's voice came, "The guests and music are waiting, miss."

"I'll dance on the upper deck, tell them," she called back.

"Yes, miss, that's what Mr. Allan said."

Mirtie shook her hair free so it hung in living gold on her shoulders and danced out, a slim, rounded figure girdled with gay balloons.

THE THREE PIECE ORCHESTRA was already at one end of the sundeck playing softly and Mirtie began to dance, a dance

His eyes kept going back to Mirtie's swinging leg.

born of fury. As she danced close to the ogling lodgemen, she snatched a cigarette from one and touched it to several of the balloons of the brassiere she had made and they fell in ruins. Anklets and wristlets fell next and she swept the cigarette down and part of the girdle began to pop.

She shook her hair back, a few golden balloons still keeping her from utter nudity, then the cigarette was struck from her hand in its downward dart and she was whisked up and carried off the sundeck, down the stairs, away from the gaping guests, away from Violetta, sitting so tense with fury at Allan's act that she felt pinned to her chair.

"I couldn't let them see you like that," raged Allan's voice, as he kicked the door shut in her own cabin. "You were so little and cute and so utterly mad. It blazed from your eyes and I felt myself curl up and die under it, because I knew you were not used to dances like that. That even the great Myrtilla hadn't done them for years and years. Why did you do it?"

"To hurt you," Mirtie said defiantly. "Go back to your wife. I'm not coming out any more, I couldn't face them. Tomorrow will be different because tomorrow you can set me ashore anywhere, I don't care where."

"Lin, Lin, let me in!" Fists pounded on the cabin door, as Violetta's voice raged.

Allan bent his head and crushed Mirtie's mouth under his and held it there while the cabin whirled and Violetta screamed his name louder and louder. Then Allan put Mirtie down on the bunk and went to the door, flung it open and slammed it shut again, shutting them out in the corridor.

Mirtie put on her negligee and crouched on the bunk shivering. She was so in love with Allan she wanted to die and by now he was pacifying Violetta, who had been in a tearing fury as what wife wouldn't, knowing he was carrying an almost completely nude girl into a dark cabin.

By and by she cried herself to sleep.

IT SEEMED AS THOUGH she had slept the clock around when she felt herself gathered up and held, and opened her eyes to find moonlight making the cabin like day and Allan holding her close against his silk robe.

"Where's your wife?" gasped Mirtie. "Where's Violetta?"

"She was asleep," Allan whispered, against the little curls on the back of Mirtie's neck.

"But, Allan—"

"Hush, forget everything but us. I've been wanting to hold you like this ever since I first saw you coming on board," he murmured, burying his mouth in the heart of the parted red lips.

Mirtie began to tremble, for his hands were caressing her through the whisper of georgette and ostrich feathers, caressing her searchingly, and she sighed and returned his kisses with eager ardor until he grew too bold. Then she slipped from his arms.

"I can't, Allan, you belong to Violetta. I thought I could. I'm crazy about you, but I can't be cheap. If she hadn't been on board maybe I would have been mad enough, but she makes everything different."

Allan reached for her in the moonlight, clutched a dimpled knee and drew her back to his arms. "Listen, and stop fighting. I'm not Allan Stressley. I'm just a friend pinch hitting for him. It didn't matter to the guests who I was—they'd never seen Allan—and he heard Violetta was two-timing him up in Maine and went pelting after her. We didn't think it would matter—but it does. I'm free as the air except for wanting you."

"Ohhh—" Mirtie slumped deep in his arms again, gasping with delight and relief. "And I've been kicking myself for falling head over heels for a married man."

"Don't do it any longer—" Allan said softly, pressing her against the cushions.

"But—but Violetta, she was mad when

(*Please turn to page* 46)

REHEARSAL FOR LOVE

By

OTTO NELSON

MAX STAGG, Broadway's ace producer of torso-talk-and-tune shows, nodded to a chair when Lon Ellis breezed into his elaborate office, scaled his hat across it and reached for a cigarette.

"What's on your mind, boss?"

Stagg appraised him with a glowering look. "Eight days and not a line of publicity in any metropolitan sheet. A fine press agent you are! I'll bet you couldn't get a paragraph on an earthquake if it laid this city like a mat. What do you do with your time—sleep out in alleys?"

Lon grinned. "Try to jackass some news about this show into columnists' columns. What have I got to write about, boss? The dolls in this piece are as colorless as gin. Nothing ever happens to 'em. Nothing ever happens to the show. It just goes on and on. If you want to make the front page why don't you set the theater on fire?"

"Enough out of you," Stagg grunted. "Look! I'm paying you, but I've got to dig up the live ideas."

"You don't dig up live ideas," Lon corrected cheerfully.

"Pay attention. You've heard of Reggie Smithfield, naturally. I got something to talk to you about."

LON INHALED AND flicked the ash from his cigarette. Reggie Smithfield. The person the producer mentioned was an irresponsible millionaire who was cutting capers on Times Square and blowing his bundle with the greatest of ease.

Reggie was a four-star, six-bell playboy supreme. His didoes were always good for photos and headlines in the tabs. He made spicy copy for the harried reporters. His amours and sensational boudoir escapades were rich in romance and saturated with sentiment.

Reggie appealed to the mob. He had color and his millions gave him glamor. His gifts to chorines ranged from a package of cigarettes to limousines. There was a saying along the stem that he had put many a little skunk in mink.

"What about that ham, Smithfield?" Lon asked.

Stagg tilted back in his super-upholstered swivel chair. He clipped the end from a fifty cent perfecto, hurled a diamond studded lighter at it and looked wise.

"Reggie," he said slowly, "has been making passes at a dame in this show."

Lon sat up straighter. "No kidding! What dame, boss?"

"That little blank who signs herself Mary May. Picture that. Him with his ready cash and her—retiring like a pup with sore eyes in the sunlight!"

Lon snapped his cigarette into a gold-plated garboon. "It's a natural!" he yodeled. *"Passionate Playboy Pursues Pretty Pansy!* It's immense, it's colossal! If Dalton Vinchell don't fall for this I can make a pair of spats out of anybody's quarrels!"

"Wait a minute! Where are you going? Sit down—there's a catch in it." Stagg waved his cigar like a baton. "The doll don't want any part of Reggie. She tears up his notes, pegs his flowers out of the window and dodges him when she leaves the theater at night. Fancy that."

LON RIPPED OUT a pencil. "Better and better!" He made notes on the back of an envelope. *"Cagey Chorine Cancels Cupid's Cashbox!* It's in the bag. I'll see the managing editor personally!"

"Will you pipe down and listen? I've got Mary parked out in the other office. This little broad has got to be made to respond to Smithfield's attentions. She's got to be educated up to him. And you're the one to do it!"

"Huh?"

Stagg spoke earnestly. "You're not a bad looking piece of person, Lon. You dress well and shave every morning. You're clean and comfortable. I'm going to introduce you to this hip swinger in a few minutes and turn her loose in your care. Get it?"

"You mean," the other frowned, "I'm to build her up and when she's ready for love turn her over to old bags of gold—or bags under the eyes?"

"Precisely. What interest has anybody in a gal who discourages a man? On the other hand look at what we can do with the press if one of our ensemble is Smithfield's latest heart? It's terrific, it's sensational! We'll pack 'em in every night—they'll be that anxious to take a peak at the Cleopatra who's asping around with Manhattan's Number One Public Interest!"

"Maybe you're right," Lon muttered. "I get the idea. Introduce me."

AN HOUR LATER Lon sat Mary May down in one of the leather lined booths at Victor's on the end of Longacre. He looked her over with the eye of a connoisseur. He liked what he saw. She was sweet and lovely to behold with her big innocent brown eyes, her clear, sparkling complexion, her demure mouth and naturally curly hair.

Unlike most of the frails who worked the Broadway grind, there was no trace of hardness in Mary's expression. She was all simplicity, fresh, naive gentleness. Lon took a peak at her legs when she sat down. Trust Max Stagg to make sure the body and accessories were perfect. Her figure was as glorified as any girl's he had ever seen. Youth was in her eyes but the hint of maturity in the swell that made the front of her dress protrude and in the nubile beauty of her hips as they sank against the leather upholstery.

"The boss thinks you ought to circulate more, Mary," Lon said easily. "You know, dodging home after the show never gets anybody anything but a good night's sleep. You're only young once. You ought to go places and have a time for yourself."

She shook her head. "I guess I'm not like other girls. I like to curl up with a book. Some day I hope to write a play. I'm working on one now in my spare time."

Lon sighed to himself. He had her trade-mark immediately. A dopey dame, innocent, innocuous, nice to look at but minus in all necessary essentials. Writing a play? What a lot of bunk that was. Probably sitting around a furnished room when she had a chance to be out places with a rich playboy, getting a chance to lean heavily on his local bank account.

Build her up was right. Give her a rehearsal for love. That's what she needed. That's what he intended to do. That's what he would do!

"I never thought this would happen," she breathed.

FOR THE NEXT WEEK Lon hung around her like twenty dollar perfume. He beat down the walls of her first resistance. He overpowered her shyness, he got her smiling at his wise-cracks and toward the end of the week he talked her into accompanying him to one of the hot spots. She wouldn't tipple with him, but he was satisfied he had covered a lot of ground. At least she wasn't cooped up writing some slushy play.

Lon liked the job. It was kind of exciting stepping out with a pretty girl like Mary. He knew dames. He'd had his moments with them. There wasn't much he could be taught in the crimson art of amour. But he had to admit Mary had something he hadn't encountered previously. Whenever he danced with her she sent his temperature up over par. When she slipped her fingers into his he felt the crawl of his nerves and when they sat together in a taxi and her thigh rested against his leg an agreeable sense of warmth pervaded him.

The second week was even more auspicious. Lon didn't have to sit in the parlor of her boarding house any more. She actually allowed him in her room. He was careful about the subject of Reggie Smithfield until one night, at the Casa Castile, he spotted the bibulous Reg with a gorgeous redhead he identified as Marylin Montrose, one of the Lane's best known dramatic stars.

"There's Reg Smithfield," Lon said to Mary. "A grand guy, a gentleman and a scholar if there ever was one. His heart's as big as his pocketbook and that's saying a bankful. You really ought to meet him. He's the soul of kindness and not at all a heel. Want to?"

"Trying to get rid of me?" Mary asked.

Lon came out of his highball glass. "Nix. I just thought—"

"As a matter of fact," she continued quietly, "Mr. Smithfield sends me flowers every night. He's written any number of notes and he gave the stage door man a hundred dollars for my telephone number. It's a little annoying. I don't believe I want to meet him."

"Okay, if you don't want."

"It's after two," Mary said, "and there's a rehearsal at ten in the morning. Perhaps you'd better take me home."

IN THE TAXI THAT went uptown Lon wondered what was the matter with his heart and pulses. They kept tingling like busy telephone wires. He had an insane desire to draw Mary up on his lap and know the magic of that softly curved mouth. He wanted to run his hands through her hair, to feel her heart beat over his and to realize to the last thrilling breath, the perfumed glamor and magic of her closeness.

"Had a perfectly grand time," she said, when they reached her boarding house. She held out her hand. "Thanks and good night."

Lon coughed huskily. "Wait a minute. Don't take a powder—just yet. I don't feel a bit sleepy. Couldn't I come up for a couple of minutes?"

"But that rehearsal—"

"Step on it. Johnny Wilcox is a pal of mine. I give him the Sioux sign and he forgets you're not present. Mary, be a good girl, just for a couple of minutes."

"Maybe if I am to be a good girl I shouldn't—"

Lon scrambled out of the cab and dropped a buck in the driver's lap.

Her room was on the top floor in the rear. Like a pair of conspirators they tiptoed into it. Lon shut the door while Mary struck a match for the old fashioned gas jet. Down in the backyard some melancholy cat lifted a Romeo yowl. The pulsebeat of the city had diminished.

"What'll we do?" Mary asked, when she hung her wrap neatly in the closet. "Would you like me to read you the first two acts of my play?"

THAT WAS LIKE a dash of cold water in Lon's flushed face.

"Have a heart! I mean," he stammered, "I'd love to hear it some other time. Mary, come over and sit near me. I don't know —something's happened to me tonight. I've got the jitters. I've got the shakes."

"You've probably drunk too much liquor," she observed primly.

Lon breathed hard. What a gal! "Listen, didn't you ever feel queer inside, sort of stirred up and brought to the boiling point?"

"Not that I know of. Why?"

"Because that's the way I feel right now."

She looked at him, surprise in her clear eyes. She brushed back a tendril of her curly hair. Her severely plain evening gown was a chalice for her opulent charms. Lon couldn't take his eyes off the figure it contained.

He had to admit that Mary sent his temperature up over par.

He realized this was the moment he had been leading up to. This was what Max Stagg meant when he had given him the job. This was the knock of opportunity on the door of success. Once he could show her the flash and fire of love, her entire viewpoint would be changed. Then she'd be like putty in his hands.

MARY SAT DOWN beside him on the edge of the couch. Her expression was perplexed. Her pretty face was grave and her eyes like two heavenly stars. Lon mustered up enough courage to put his arm around her. She started but didn't draw away. Inch by inch he moved her closer to him.

"You're the one who's responsible for what I'm feeling," he told her throatily.

She looked up at him. "You mean—"

"I mean I'm in a spell, a trance. I've got to kiss you, Mary! I've got to taste those red lips—"

She gave a little exclamation when he half turned her. He leaned closer to her while her head sagged to the cushion. She seemed frightened, numb and unresponsive when his mouth closed over hers.

After a minute the thrill of the kiss began to arouse her. Suddenly her lips grew hot beneath his own, her hands tightened convulsively. She trembled, growing tense and then relaxing, her skirt whipped around her beautiful legs so her knees were revealed, together with inches of white skin above her stocking tops.

In that position Lon kissed her again and again.

"You're the most wonderful thing that has ever hit Broadway!" he whispered madly.

She looked at him with sleepy eyes. "I never thought this would happen," she breathed. "I—I suppose it's life—it's what I need to experience if I'm to write true to life plays. Kiss me again, Lon!"

IT WAS SIX O'CLOCK in the morning when Lon left the boarding house and went back to his own suite at a Forty-eighth Street hotel. Just before he ran a hot and cold shower he narrowed his eyes and spoke through tight lips: "I'm a son of a gun, if the dame doesn't love me!"

He didn't have to be wise to realize the rehearsal for love had made Mary wild about him. She was like putty in his hands. Two nights later, again at the Casa Castile, he had no trouble introducing Mary to Reggie Smithfield when he brought the latter around to their table.

Then, as an excuse to leave the superplayboy alone with Mary, Lon murmured something about an imaginary telephone call and hung around the foyer for thirty minutes.

Later, when he took her home, Mary said: "Mr. Smithfield is real pleasant. I see now I did make a mistake not answering his notes and throwing his flowers away. We've made a date for tomorrow night. He wants me to come up to his apartment. He's having a dinner party and he wants me to be the guest of honor. Isn't that exciting?"

Lon kissed the smooth cheek resting close to his shoulder.

"Exciting as hell. Tomorrow night, guest of honor. Nice going, Mary."

When he went home and turned in he couldn't sleep very well. He had every reason to be satisfied. He had fulfilled Max Stagg's instructions and he had publicity for the show that no paper could pass up. But Lon turned and tossed restlessly for hours before dropping off in a fitful sleep.

THE NEXT NIGHT he missed their rendezvous in the stage door alley. No Mary was there to sweep gorgeously out and meet him. He missed her laughter, her starry eyes swimming before him, the warmth of her little hand in his and the velvety feel of the lips so anxious to return his eager kisses.

Lon dumped himself in front of a bar

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EXTRA ATTENTION

THE Jack High Kid was in town.

The minute Georgia Lee heard the news she hurried down to Mel Cassett's private office at the El Puma. The owner of Downsville's popular dance hall, cafe and casino looked plenty worried. Georgia saw that when she slipped in and shut the door behind her.

"I heard it," Cassett said, flicking the ash from his cigar. "Your boy friend blew in from Frisco last night with a bundle of coin. He's stopping at the Parker House and he'll probably be around any time."

Georgia climbed up on Cassett's lap. In her haste to see and tell him the news she had neglected to dress further than the light kimono thrown over the willowy figure that wowed them every night at the El Puma.

The kimono slipped from one white shoulder. It revealed the fact she wore no brassiere; that stockings, slippers and a scanty pair of bright blue step-ins constituted her complete attire. Georgia rested her brown, fluffy head against Cassett's shoulder. Playfully she nipped at his ear with her sharp, gleaming teeth.

"What's the matter, honey boy? Out of sorts tonight?"

By CLIFF CARRUTH

"What are we going to do, Mel?" she whispered, cuddling to him.

Familiar glints lighted his eyes. He pressed her closer to him. His long, angular face darkened.

"I'm not giving you back to him. You're my gal now! I'm mad about you, Georgie! Nobody's going to get you!"

Georgia sighed. "The Kid's got an awful temper," she murmured. "He's crazy about me, too. If he thought you'd cut in while he was away, he'd—"

She paused. Cassett nodded.

"Yeah, I know—reach for his gat and blow me up! But he ain't going to know," he added softly.

GEORGIA STIRRED in his ardent embrace. She twisted around, one milky thigh exposed as the kimono slid away from it, her unprisoned breasts nearly spilling out from the wide crack in the robe's front.

"What—"

Cassett fondled her fluffy hair with nervous fingers.

"He ain't gonna know," he continued, "because you're smart. When he comes here we won't do what other folks make a mistake in doing. We won't tell him we're in love. Instead you'll be 'specially nice to him and give him a lot of extra attention."

"Then—what?"

Cassett shrugged. "I'll think of something. The main thing is to keep him happy, don't let him get suspicious—keep his mind occupied—so he won't be thinkin' about anything but you. Get it?"

For a minute Georgia brooded. Finally she made a grimace.

"I get it, but I don't like it, Mel. Kissing him now won't be the same. Like medicine," she explained, "after kissing you—so much!"

"Sure," Cassett agreed, "but which is better—the medicine and the extra attention—or me stretched out on the floor full of holes?"

"Okay." The girl got off his lap. She ran her ruby tipped fingers affectionately down his seamy cheek. "I'll do what you say. Don't worry—I'll keep him quiet—but you'd better hurry up with an idea—just so he won't want to get a finger on the trigger of his Roscoe."

THE EL PUMA was going full blast when the Jack High Kid breezed in that night. The women gave him long, lingering looks. The Kid was enough to make any feminine heart flutter. He was tall, rakish and picturesquely handsome. He had the complexion of a baby, clear gray eyes, curly blond hair. In the early twenties, with his slim, artistic hands, and the slight swagger he affected, the Kid was known from Fargo through to 'Frisco.

No other gambler combined skill with personality. And the Kid was nobody's fool. He had a quick temper and was quick on the draw. His mind worked in split-seconds always. People who knew him were careful not to cross him.

Smiling and nodding, the Kid went down after the waiter who led the way to a choice table. He dropped into the chair beside it, ordered whiskey and looked at the floor show. Mel Cassett took care the entertainment was one hundred per cent. He imported his talent from Times Square. He had a couple of strip teasers good as any in the Broadway night joints.

The Kid relaxed with a cigarette. Presently the show reached that point where Georgia Lee romped in to do her number. The lights dimmed. In the amber shadows the Kid leaned tensely forward. His mouth tightened and his eyes narrowed.

Georgia swayed as she put all of her charm into the hot Harlem rhythm tune she opened with. The Kid's glance never left her. It embraced all details of her sweetly curved figure. Like a searchlight it flashed over her neck and shoulders, the lush fullness of her breasts, the flatness of her tummy and the sweeping lines of hips, thighs and legs.

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(*Continued from page* 16)

She wore a high hat, a short mess jacket and gossamer pants. Rhinestone studded shoes made her feet twinkling fireflies. Her eyes were slumberous, her crimson lips a reluctant promise and her smile tantalizing.

SHE GOT UNDER the customers' skins. They brought her back for an encore and two bends when her specialty concluded. The Kid finished his drink, handed the waiter money to pay the check and picked a way around to a side door.

That led past the bar and to a flight of stairs. He went up them leisurely. Mel Cassett's office was lighted. The Kid darted a look at the lazy cigar smoke drifting out before continuing on up to the third floor.

Georgia used her bedroom as a dressing room. It was at the end of the corridor. The Kid didn't bother to knock. One slim hand twined around the knob. He pushed the unlocked door open.

"Hello, cream puff. I'm back!"

Georgia's soft exclamation quickly turned to one of well feigned pleasure. She was stepping out of the gossamer pants. She dropped them, caught up the same kimono she had worn in Mel's office that afternoon, donned it swiftly and bathed him with the full radiance of her kindling smile.

"Kid! Honey! When did you get in?"

"Yesterday. Didn't you hear?"

"Not a word."

"Better let a medico test your ears, cream puff. Everybody else in town was wise to it two minutes after I fell off the rattler."

Georgia went to him softly. Mel's instructions were sharp in her mind when she stood on tiptoe and draped her arms languorously around his neck.

"I'm so glad!" she crooned. "I've missed you so much, lamby pie! Seems like you've been gone for years and years."

"Instead of four weeks. Never mind. I took some of the biggest wheel spinners in the business for a piece of their bundles. Thirty grand in cash. Will we have a time for ourselves?"

GEORGIA FORCED HER lips to meet his. She kept her mouth clinging while he embraced her. She winced when the flat of his hand roved intimately over her warm skin. Funny how a gal changed. A month ago there was no one else in the world except the Jack High Kid. Now it was all Mel.

Against the protruding push of her breasts she felt the significant bulge of the automatic he wore in a shoulder scabbard close to his left arm. When he sat down on the couch, still holding her closely, Georgia suppressed a shudder. One wrong move and that hidden gun would blaze death!

"How's 'Frisco?" she asked, with pretended indolence.

"Steppin' high. Even the Chinks on Kearney Street have dough. They're throwing away their old opium pipes and getting new ones. How've you been?"

"Just fine, honey."

"Folks here been treating you right?"

"You bet."

The Kid twisted around, leaned over and looked deep into her clear eyes.

"Missed me a whole lot, eh?"

"You know how much."

"Glad I'm back?"

"Thrilled all over!"

The Kid released her and got up. "Let's have a drink. Call a boy and get a bottle. None of that usual cat milk. The best."

WHEN THE LIQUOR arrived the Kid had a couple of shots and stretched comfortably out on the end of the couch.

"Heard a hot one coming in on the train," he continued. "It was about a traveling salesman who left his wife for a month. He took a trip as far as Tacoma and while he was gone his boss dropped

around to leave his salary. The boss met the missus, liked her looks and asked her to step out with him. She did and they had a lot of fun together for the whole month."

He stopped. Georgia ran the pink tip of her tongue over her moist, inviting lips.

"What—what else?"

The Kid grinned crookedly. "Got you a little interested? Well, when the hubby came back he smelled a rodent. He asked his handcuffs if she had missed him and so forth. She said yes and did a lot of snuggling, but it didn't fool him none. He figured there was something sour and pretty soon he got suspicious of the boss. So he dreamed up a trap and—"

Georgia drew a slightly unsteady breath. "What kind of a trap was it?"

"Oh, just a dopey idea of his. Don't interrupt. As I was saying, the dame walked right into it with both feet, the guy had the bill of goods signed and checked and there was only one thing to do. He hauled out his cannon and when he got through blasting his former employer, woolen underwear in a drawer full of moths didn't have half as many holes.

Georgia's eyes retreated behind their white lids. What was the point of the yarn? Why did he tell it to her? Was there something secret and significant about it? Did he know, did he suspect?

SHE SHOOK HER HEAD impatiently. That was out of the question. She and Mel had reckoned with him. They knew he was dangerous and they had been mighty careful. There was no one at El Puma who could point a finger at them. She was sure of that.

And yet—

Recalling her instructions that said she was to supply plenty of extra attention, Georgia shook off her fears. She went over and curled up on the Kid's lap. Playfully she nipped at his ear with her sharp, gleaming teeth. Affectionately she drew her fingers down his smooth cheeks and rubbed his chin against the back of her hand.

"What's the matter, honey boy? You seem kind of out of sorts tonight."

"I'm not feeling on the peak. I can't get that two-timing jane out of my mind. How do I know you've been playing square all along this month?"

Georgia laughed merrily. "Gosh, you are curdled. Here, oil your tonsils again. Where do you get those ridiculous notions?"

"You're a swell looking babe and there's a lot of hombres in this slab I wouldn't trust as far as I could throw this building with one hand. Why wouldn't they be on the make the minute I aired?"

Georgia didn't need a blueprint to know what to do. She had to get such silly ideas out of the Kid's mind. Cleverly she maneuvered so the right shoulder of the kimono slipped down over her arm. With her knee she pushed aside its clinging folds. Her white leg stole through it. She made her eyes slumberous and her pursed lips tempting.

"Kid, be sweet to me!"

"You have been on the level?"

"Of course."

HE LEANED AND KISSED HER. He smothered her with a flare of quick emotion that snuffed out as rapidly as it had blazed up.

"Okay. I believe you. Look. I only came back here for a reason. You're it!"

Through Georgia's mind confusion and curiosity blended.

"What do you mean?"

"I've got to be back in 'Frisco by Thursday noon. It's important. And you're going with me. We're both leaving on the Owl tonight!"

With a gasp, Georgia pulled away from him. There was no pretending her surprise, no artifice in the way the kimono behaved or what it revealed. Blankly, she stared at him as if she hadn't heard right.

"Leave—tonight?"

"Right away. Soon as you can pack."

"But—" she began hesitantly.

He caught her arm. "Yes or no?" His handsome face hardened. "You want to stay or you want to go? If you stay you've got a reason. If you go you've been telling me the truth, you still love me. What's the answer?"

She put all her charm into the hot Harlem rhythm tune.

For a fleeting round of seconds Georgia did some fast thinking. She had to go! To attempt subterfuge or try to hoax him meant adding fuel to the fire of his suspicions. That was already smoldering, she saw. To go meant probably saving Mel Cassett's life. The Kid hadn't told her the story of the traveling salesman for nothing. Possibly he already had a line on Mel and her new affection for the owner of the El Puma.

Besides, she argued, leaving with him wouldn't be forever. Out in 'Frisco she could wait her chance and split. Then Mel again!

"All right, I'll go, sweetie. Give me about ten minutes to dress and pack."

THE JACK HIGH KID lighted a cigarette. From the end of the couch he watched while she replaced the kimono with a brown silk dress, with stockings to match, and high heeled slippers.

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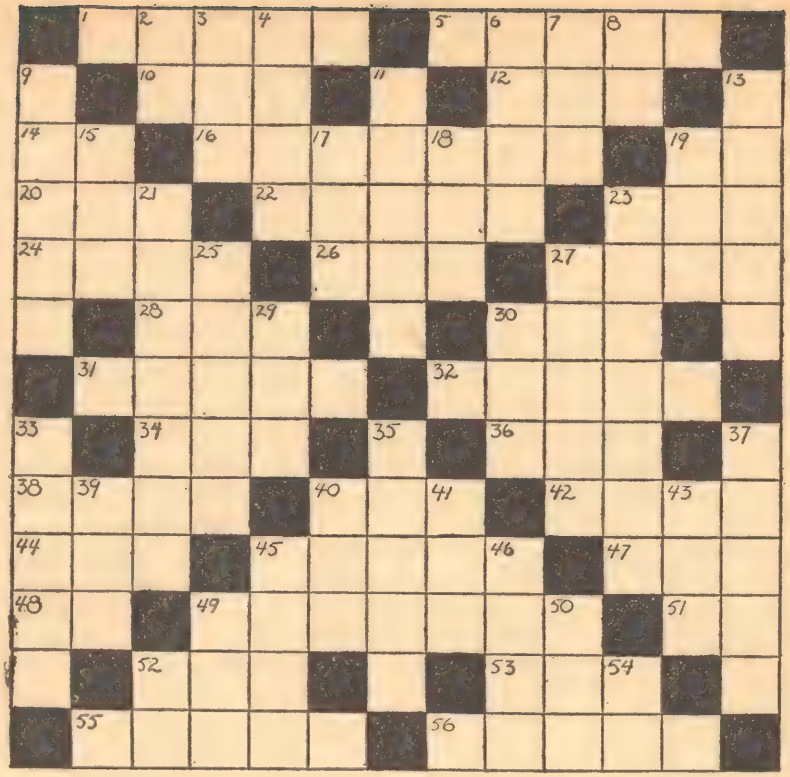
SNAPPY PUZZLE



(*For Solution See Page* 48)

HORIZONTAL

1. Gives the ol' glad-eye
5. Obsolete emotion
10. ——, ditto divine
12. Compass point
14. Preposition
16. Champion gabbers
19. Italian river
20. Keen looker
22. General direction
23. Where the boys want to go
24. Stronghold
26. Have being
27. You have it in your hair
28. Mite
30. Your sailor sweetheart
31. Prudish; proper
32. Makes hot
34. The gals shake a mean one
36. Born
38. Now and——
40. Dumb like a——
42. Let fall
44. The well known "gate"
45. What nine gals out of ten ain't
47. Look
48. Regarding
49. Train
51. Sun god
52. Face (slang)
53. Upper portion
55. Where bad people go
56. Ore

VERTICAL

2. By
3. What the cow says
4. Kind of wine
6. A large group
7. Dumb cluck
8. Myself
9. Silly guys
11. The rear end
13. Forward
15. Rocking your baby to and——
17. Constellation
18. Single
19. The golfer's objective
21. What you aren't like to your gal
23. They all seem to have daughters
25. Teach tricks
27. Peeled
29. To make incline
30. What the sun gives you
33. The double-O
35. A famous kind of nose
37. A pointed instrument
39. Hasten
40. Evergreen
41. How Caesar wrote fourteen
43. Over (poetical)
45. Bind
46. What your beau asks for
49. A nasty man
50. Negative
52. A feller's best friend
54. Daddy (not sugar)

AMATEUR TALENT

By

Claire Kennedy

SOME night, when you haven't much to do, plant both feet on the curbstone at Times Square and take a good gander at the Main Stem. What do you see? You see Broadway, a wild, painted thoroughfare without any class or style; a crimson-lipped voluptuary stretched out right in the middle of the world's biggest street, its skirts up to its hips, a cigarette in one hand and a champagne glass in the other. Dough makes the Main Stem's wheels go around but dough doesn't keep its heart beating.

What heart? Well, there's plenty of it along the dark side streets and behind the drab brownstone fronts of rooming houses. And Broadway's heart is plenty big, believe you me.

Johnny Ames knew it and made the knowledge pay dividends. He had been leading a band and acting as master of ceremonies at the *Club Mucho* when the idea struck him. Later that night, he spotted Gregory Winthrop, the Colonial Broadcasting Co. executive, at one of the tables. Winthrop was with Mona Evans, the blonde, svelte-bodied radio soprano. Johnny waited for an intermission before approaching Winthrop's table. He knew the Colonial executive but he didn't know Mona Evans.

Winthrop introduced him. The blonde's eyelashes were black and heavily beaded. She was a gorgeous looking woman, tall and slim with high, pointed breasts and hips that had the liquid fluidity of running water.

"Pull up a chair, Johnny," Winthrop said. "What's on your mind?" he added as Johnny sat down.

AT THE MOMENT, Mona Evans was on Johnny's mind. He couldn't help noticing how the points of her breasts made indentations in the bodice of her cerise satin gown. He couldn't help seeing the upper smoothness of her twin charms, visible above the low neckline. He couldn't help feeling as though he wanted to reach out and touch her velvet, milky-white throat.

"I simply adored the way you played *This Year's Kisses*," she said.

Her voice did crazy things to Johnny's emotional stability. It was deep and throaty, almost sensuously indecent.

Johnny flushed a little. "Uh—thanks."

He watched, fascinated, as she ran the fingers of her right hand over her bare left arm. It wasn't just a casual gesture, it was a voluptuous caress. Johnny's blood began to tingle in his veins. He thought he saw a promise in Mona Evans' eyes.

"Got something hot for me, Johnny?" Winthrop questioned. Johnny tapped the end of a cigarette against his thumbnail. "An idea, Mr. Winthrop. It may turn out to be hot."

The radio executive sipped his highball. "Spill it."

Johnny lit his cigarette, took a deep draught. "You know how out-of-towners look at Broadway, Mr. Winthrop. All lights, all glitter and all show off. They don't stop to consider that Broadway has a heart, that the people who are responsible for Broadway have hearts. They don't know how Broadway takes care of its own and never asks for outside charity."

Johnny was warming up. His eyes glowed with enthusiasm. "Suppose we put a program on the air called *The Heart of Broadway*. Suppose we tell the country what Broadway really stands for. Suppose we offer to lend a helping hand to anyone interested in carving out a career on Broadway. Suppose we make Broadway live and breathe, give it a soul. Right now, it's just a street with a million lights on it."

GREGORY WINTHROP'S keen, gray eyes narrowed. "I think you've got something there, Johnny. Actually, it's just the amateur hour idea in a new dress but I think you have something. *The Heart of Broadway.*" He repeated the phrase. "Sounds like a natural. See me at my office in the morning but don't mention it to a soul."

Mona Evans leaned forward. Her rigidly firm breasts bellied out the front of her gown. Johnny's heart pounded as he saw the valley between the twin beauties.

"It sounds wonderful," she said. "I do hope it succeeds, Johnny." Her eyelashes flickered. "You don't mind my calling you Johnny, do you?"

The roof of Johnny's mouth was as dry as cotton. "N-no, not at all."

She smiled. "You can call me Mona. Everybody does."

Johnny glanced at the orchestra stand. The musicians were already in their places. "I'll have to go now," he said, "thanks a lot."

Winthrop rose. "See you in the morning, Johnny, about ten."

Mona Evans looked up. The line from her chin to the tops of her breasts was a perfect undulation. "Play *This Year's Kisses* for me, Johnny," she murmured.

Johnny's hands were moist and hot when he reached the orchestra stand. *"This Year's Kisses,"* he said, "four choruses, sweet and soft."

Bill Harvey, the saxophonist who shared a small apartment with Johnny, lipped the reed of his instrument. "We did that in the last set," he said.

Johnny frowned. "Do it again."

Johnny tapped his baton, faced the dance floor as the orchestra went into the request number. He saw Gregory Winthrop and Mona Evans rise from the table. Before she stepped into the radio executive's arms, Johnny got a profile view of her willowy figure. Her satin gown hugged her hips and breasts with the tenacity of adhesive tape. She smiled up at Johnny as they glided past the orchestra stand.

WINTHROP AND THE radio songstress left the *Club Mucho* soon after the playing of the number she had requested. Johnny handled the floor show at 1.30, led the orchestra in its final set at 3.00. Customarily, Bill Harvey and Johnny stopped in at a restaurant for coffee and a sandwich before heading for their apartment, but tonight, Johnny vetoed the idea. Bill shrugged, followed him into a cab.

"You went hook, line and sinker, didn't you?" he commented.

Johnny's face paled. His lips became tinged with purple. "Don't be a wise guy," he snapped. "Tend to your own knitting."

Bill shrugged. "Happy landings, Mr. Romeo. Only look out you don't go into a tailspin. That Evans dame is dynamite."

There was nothing more said until they reached the apartment. Then it was Johnny who opened the conversation again. He was in a fighting mood with a chip on his shoulder.

"How come you know so much, smart Aleck?"

Bill's expression was guileless. "Me, I know next to nothing. I'll admit Mona Evans has what it takes. I could go for her chassis myself. But even the old biddy who sells apples in Shubert's alley could tell you that Mona Evans is poison. She's twisted a dozen guys around her fingers and what did it get them—nothing. The

moment I saw you mosey over to her table, I knew there was trouble coming."

Johnny snickered. "You'd better get a new crystal ball, Swami. If it'll help ease your mind any, I went over to talk to Gregory Winthrop. Miss Evans just happened to be sitting there."

"Yeah, and she just happened to dance past and give you a million volt come-on with those big, blue bedroom eyes of hers. Go ahead, have your good time. You know what it's all about."

"Come sit close to me," she whispered softly.

JOHNNY WAS SHAVING at nine the next morning when Bill Harvey came to the door of the bathroom. "I thought you might be interested in this." He read from a tabloid in his hands. "Johnny Ames, the band leader and so-so master of ceremonies, is signing up for some lessons in love. He was seen placing a deposit with Mona Evans, the radio heartbreaker. Chalk up another victory for La Evans."

Portions of Johnny's face, clean of lather, showed deep red. "Who printed that?" he snarled.

Bill offered the paper. *Ken Carpenter in his Times Square Tattletale column.*

Johnny snatched the paper, verified the comment. "I'll fix that rat. He's been itching for a smack in the nose and now he's going to get it."

Bill shook his head soberly. "My motto is never hit a newspaper man. They've got too much to hit back with. Anyway, this proves what I told you."

Johnny swung around. "It doesn't prove a damned thing. I'll fix Carpenter's wagon. It's about time someone did."

Johnny was still boiling when he reached the Colonial Broadcasting Co. offices. He had calmed down somewhat when he left. Gregory Winthrop had approved the setup for the program. Johnny was to handle it from beginning to end, with his band supplying the music.

He broke the good news to the boys at the *Club Mucho* that night. Bill Harvey sidled up to him.

"So that's why you spoke to Winthrop. Why didn't you tell a fellow?"

Johnny turned away. "Why didn't you look into your crystal ball?"

IT WAS CLOSE to midnight when Johnny spotted Ken Carpenter, the tabloid columnist, entering the *Club Mucho*. He took a seat at a table off in the corner, ordered a drink. His black, ferret-sharp eyes darted about the room. Johnny didn't wait for the number to end. He stepped off the stand, weaved his way through the tables, reached the one at which Carpenter was seated. The columnist saw him coming.

"Hello, Ames," he greeted. Johnny's fist headed for the columnist's jaw. Carpenter ducked but four knuckles caught him flush on the cheek. His head snapped on his shoulders. Johnny followed it with a short left that almost flattened Carpenter's nose.

Only a few people saw the punches being thrown. Emile, the headwaiter, ran over. Carpenter, dazed, was holding a napkin to his bleeding face.

The headwaiter and the doorman hurried the columnist out of the night club, before anything further happened. Johnny went back to the band stand, eyeing his bruised knuckles.

Shortly before closing time, Emile delivered a note to him. He shielded it with his hands, read it.

Johnny: I'm waiting for you.
My car is around the corner.
Expectantly,
Mona.

IT TOOK JOHNNY only five minutes to wash up and leave the club. He turned the corner, saw a big, black limousine pulled up at the curb. In a moment, he was seated beside Mona Evans.

"To the apartment, Naki," she instructed her Japanese chauffeur. Then she turned to Johnny. "I wanted so much to see you and congratulate you. Gregory told me he had arranged to put you on the air. I think it's wonderful."

Johnny's head swam as he caught a whiff of her perfume. It was heavy, exotic stuff. Her sable wrap was open and as the car passed a street light, he could see her alabaster throat and the soft rondures of her breasts.

"Aren't you thrilled with it all?" she questioned.

Right now, Johnny was thrilled with what his eyes could see. "I—I guess I am," he stammered.

Mona Evans' hand dropped on his knee. "We'll open a bottle of champagne to celebrate," she said softly. She drew an audible breath. "You know, I've been thinking about you ever since I met you last night."

Johnny found it difficult to breathe. He knew she was urging him on, practically beckoning for his arms to slip under the wrap and embrace her. He would have done it if the car hadn't pulled up at the curb in front of a large apartment house.

Mona Evans led the way through the lobby and into an elevator up to her penthouse suite. There was champagne cooling in a wine bucket and hors d'oeuvres arranged on a tray.

The gorgeous blonde dropped down on a sofa, stretched languorously. The cones of her unfettered breasts punched out the front of her gown. "It's so good to get home," she said, holding one graceful hand out to Johnny. "Come, sit with me. You'll have to open the champagne. The servants have gone to bed. I think a 3 a. m. rendezvous should be absolutely private, don't you?"

JOHNNY WASN'T in a thinking mood. Somehow, he managed to tear the foil away from the champagne cork, pop it. His hand trembled as he poured the bubbling liquid into two glasses.

Mona raised one of them. "To your success, darling," she said softly.

Johnny emptied his glass, set it on a coffee table. Mona had only taken a sip of hers. She reached out, slipped her cool fingers into Johnny's hand.

Johnny tried to tear his eyes away from her rising and falling breasts, but they were like twin magnets. He knew he couldn't stand this much longer. The blood in his veins was like molten lead.

Mona swayed towards him, her bare shoulders squared and her gorgeous bosom outthrust with provocative allure.

She was in his arms and Johnny's mouth was tight pressed to her hot lips. Her hands slid over his shoulders and joined at the back of his neck. Somehow, the floor length skirt of her gown had come up above her knees. She twisted in Johnny's arms. One of his hands dropped on a silk-sheathed roundness. There was soft, warm flesh above his fingers.

The kiss came to an end only because Johnny had to breathe. Mona's eyes were

As she threw her arms around his neck a camera shutter clicked.

half closed, sensuous. "Oh you darling, you darling," she murmured.

Johnny had tasted the sweetness of her mouth and he wanted more. He bent her back, ran his hand up her curved side. The under surface of her bare arm was as smooth as fine velvet. Only a thin layer of satin stood between his eager fingers and the pliant resiliency of her rounded curves. In his mad anxiety, he clawed at the shoulder straps that held her bodice up.

NONE OF THE MORNING papers carried any mention of the altercation at the *Club Mucho*. Ken Carpenter was smart enough to know adverse publicity when he saw it. He nursed his puffed up nose in the privacy of his apartment, planned revenge.

Johnny walked on air. He moved out of the night club with his band, started rehearsals for the first *Heart Of Broadway* program. His evenings were spent in Mona Evans' company. Bill Harvey looked on but said nothing.

The inaugural broadcast was a gala affair. Before it was over, the studio switchboard was jammed with phone calls from delighted listeners. Telegrams poured in. The program had gone over. It was a hit. More than two hundred amateurs wanted a hearing.

Johnny took it all modestly. In the corridor, Bill Harvey drew him aside. "Swell going, pal," he said. "How about celebrating with a sandwich and a mug of beer, just like old times?"

Johnny fingered his white tie. "Sorry, but I'm busy."

Bill grinned. "Okay." On the street in front of the broadcasting building, Bill watched Johnny step into Mona Evans' car. He saw the voluptuous blonde wriggle into Johnny's arms and give him the parted moistness of her blood-red lips.

Bill was sitting up and reading when Johnny barged in at four that morning. "I found out something you should know," he said. "Carpenter is gunning for you because of that beating you gave him."

"So what?" Johnny sneered.

"He had lunch with Mona Evans at the Troc yesterday. Put two and two together and you get four. That Evans woman is a publicity hound. She knows Carpenter can give her plenty of space. She'd sell her grandmother for a newspaper plug."

Johnny stiffened. "I've heard enough from you! If you don't like the way I run my life, get out!"

The expression on Bill Harvey's face was pitying. "Sure thing, Johnny. I'll move in the morning."

JOHNNY LIKED HIS new job. Once every week, his voice went out over the air waves, penetrated into every little hamlet, pleaded with young, talented hopefuls.

"Broadway opens its heart to you! Broadway welcomes you! Broadway wants you!"

A month went by. Bill Harvey still handled his saxophone in the band but he and Johnny barely said a word to one another. He had moved out of the apartment and was staying at a small hotel.

Following an afternoon audition, during which Johnny had chosen four aspirants out of eighty, he returned to his apartment to dress for the broadcast. He had stepped out of the shower and was walking around in his dressing gown when the door opened and Bill Harvey came in.

"Hello, Johnny," he greeted.

Johnny's eyes went cold. "What's the big idea of coming in without ringing?"

"Force of habit. I forgot to give you my key when I left. But that's not why I'm here. I got a tip something's going to happen. I want you to get into the bedroom and listen. Make it snappy."

Johnny flared up. "You're crazy! Get out of here before I call the cops."

Bill sighed. "I hate like hell to do this, Johnny, but time is short." He stepped forward, pistoned a punch to the point of Johnny's jaw. The band leader folded like an empty potato sack.

BILL CAUGHT HIM before he fell, carried him into the bedroom, stretched him out. He locked the door behind him as he stepped back into the living room. Ten minutes went by. The bell rang. Bill answered it. A red-headed girl in a sleazy silk dress faced him.

"Mr. Ames?" she questioned.

Bill nodded. "That's right."

The girl wriggled into the room. Her soft breasts jiggled sensuously under her dress bodice. "I want to see you, Mr. Ames," she said. "It's about your program. You *must* give me a chance! You *must!*"

Bill looked her over. There was too much rouge on her cheeks, too much paint on her plump lips. Her body was loose and soft.

"We hold auditions at the studio," he said.

Her eyes flashed. "No, that won't do!" Without warning she leaned over, lifted the hem of her skirt, jerked the silk dress over her head. She was wearing pink chiffon panties and a theatrical brassiere that gave her breasts the uplift they lacked. Her milky-white stomach curved decidedly. Her thighs were big. She reached behind her, fumbled with the strap of the brassiere.

"I think you've removed enough," Bill said calmly, stepping to the door. He yanked it open. Mona Evans, Ken Carpenter and a newspaper photographer were grouped in the hall. "Come in," Bill invited.

The red-headed girl leaped at Bill, threw her arms around his neck. A camera shutter clicked.

"That's not Ames!" Carpenter cried.

"No, you rat," Bill snarled.

THERE WAS A POUNDING at the bedroom door. Bill opened it. Johnny, his jaw swollen, staggered out.

"There's the layout, Johnny," Bill said. "Your friend, Miss Evans, and Carpenter had a frame all set. They were going to snap you with this half-naked girl and cook up a story about how you made the amateurs on your program pay for auditions. I've been lunching at the next table to them for a month getting all the dope."

Carpenter, Mona Evans, the photographer and the red headed girl were rapidly fading down the hall. Bill picked up his hat.

"So long, Johnny," he said.

Johnny's voice was husky. "Wait a minute, Bill. Maybe you'd better bring your stuff back, huh?"

Bill grinned. "Think so?"

"I'm sure of it." Johnny's eyes dropped to the floor. "You know, I was beginning to think this business of Broadway having a heart was so much hokum. I know differently now."

"Nuts," Bill said. "How about tonight, after the broadcast, you and me having a sandwich and a mug of beer, huh? Maybe we can date a couple of dames, too."

Johnny smiled. "Okay, pal."

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Extra Attention

(*Continued from page* 35)

He nodded approval when she laid the contents of the bureau drawers in a big valise. He smiled when she stopped to heavily lipstick her crimson mouth, use an eyebrow pencil briefly and pull on a tiny hat.

"All set?"

"I'm ready," Georgia said steadily.

He turned out the light and led the way down the stairs. When they reached the landing below the Kid halted.

"By the way, you'd better stop in and tell Cassett he's losing you. He's in his office, I saw him when I came up awhile ago. I'll wait here. Don't be too long."

Silently, Georgia went across to the office door. She opened it, closed it. The Kid leaned against the railing fringing the well of the staircase. He listened to the swirl of music that came up.

Georgia's hand on his own lifted his retrospective gaze.

"Let's go," she said.

The Kid frowned suddenly. "I guess I'd better stop in and say good-bye to Mel, too. After all, it's kind of tough on him—me walking out with his stellar attraction. Stick around and wach the bag, I'll be right back."

Georgia nervously waited a full five minutes before the office door opened slowly. The Jack High Kid spoke from the threshold:

"Babe, step inside here for a minute."

SOMETHING THAT WAS cold and ominous lanced through Georgia. She had to force her feet to move. She reached the door. The Kid stepped aside to let her pass. Mel Cassett was tipped back in his swivel chair before the desk, a fresh cigar clamped between his teeth, an odd expression on his angular face.

"What is it?"

In reply the Kid laughed. "Come clean, Georgia. You and Mel are this-and-that

about each other, aren't you? Don't bother to lie, I've got the proof. Remember the story of the traveling salesman I was telling you? The trap the guy dreamed up was when he saw his wife put on lipstick—the way *you* did a few minutes ago."

Cassett said nothing. Georgia's eyes widened.

"Lipstick?" she repeated.

The Kid nodded.

"It might be strictly Kosher for you to stop in and say good-bye to Mel and maybe give him a farewell kiss. But when a dame kisses a lug six or eight times all over his pan, that's something else again. Come over here where the light's better and take a look."

Georgia moved closer to the desk. There she saw what he meant. In the haste of her leave-taking she hadn't paid any attention to the red smears of lipsick she had left as souvenirs on Cassett's chin, cheeks and the ear she had nipped for what she thought might be the last time!

THE KID'S HAND moved slowly to the front of his coat. Cassett jumped up, white and shaken.

"What are you going to do, Kid?"

His voice was shrill with alarm. The Kid laughed.

"I'll show you!" His tone was like polished steel. "I'll show you what it means to cut in and steal my gal when I'm away!"

Frozen with terror Georgia watched the slim, artistic hand move under the coat. An eternity seemed to pass before it came out. The Kid's fingers were tightly clasped about a photograph.

"What—what's that?" she managed to stammer weakly.

"This? A photo of the swellest little dame in 'Frisco! Remember I told you I had to be there by Thursday noon? That's so me and her can tie up. Before I did that I had to make sure the stuff grapevined out to me was the real McCoy.

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I mean, about you and Mel playing hearts. How could I marry any doll thinking that you still had a yen for me? I'm no dirty skunk!"

Mel Cassett stuck out his hand.

"Thanks, Kid."

"For what?"

The owner of the El Puma looked at the dumbfounded Georgia before he answered.

"For fixing up your women before you throw 'em out!" he grinned.

The Great Myrtilla

(*Continued from page* 8)

you brought me here. She's crazy about you, isn't she?" Mirtie asked jealously.

"I'm afraid so, but it doesn't matter. I'm crazy about you and you're to start thinking of me as Lin, not Allan," he commanded, and found the crescent mole with his lips.

MIRTIE WRIGGLED CLOSER to him and sighed with pleasure as his lips fastened on hers and clung while the moonlight trailed out of the cabin, leaving darkness behind.

"We'll have the captain go out beyond the three mile limit and marry us in the morning," planned Lin, after a long interlude of silence.

"Lin! Lin! I know you are in there! You come out!" Violetta's loud whisper came through the door.

Silence, while Mirtie snuggled deeper into Lin's arms.

"All right, *I happen to know the real Myrtilla is in Boston.* I'm going to radio her you have a girl posing as her here on board, and just how shameless she is acting. She'll have her arrested for impersonating her—"

Lin stirred but Mirtie's arms clasped around his neck and she put her warm red lips over his and kept him from answering. They heard Violetta's heels click toward the radio room.

"It's all right," soothed Mirtie, when the damage the kiss had done was taken care of. "Myrtilla's my mother. She put me in a stuffy boarding school and I ran away because I wanted to be an actress, but you'd better marry me before she comes pelting after me. By the way, how did you know I wasn't the real Myrtilla?"

"Because I wrote her last show, so I've met her more than once," Lin said, from the vicinity of the pulse in Mirtie's throat.

Rehearsal For Love

(*Continued from page* 14)

on Forty-fifth Street and inhaled a couple of rock and ryes. He knew what Smithfield's "parties" meant. That was an old gag to get a girl up in his rooms before turning on the heavy romance. "Guest of honor!" That was another laugh. There wasn't any honor where Reggie was concerned and she'd be the only guest.

Lon groaned. What a champ chump he was! Mary loved him and he had tossed her to the lions without a qualm! She loved him—she loved him—the words went around in his head like a squirrel in a cage. And he—

Abruptly a dull flame of hot anger blazed within him. He looked at the clock over the bar. Ten after midnight! It wasn't too late yet. Of a sudden he made up his mind. Like print on a page he saw what to do and how to do it—the answer to every problem.

Lon shoved money across the mahogany, pulled his hat further down over his ears and hurried out. Broadway was a flaming pageant of multi-colored lights. Bathed in their fiery reflection, Lon waited until an empty cab came by.

It stopped at his signal. Out of a well ordered memory he plucked Smithfield's address:

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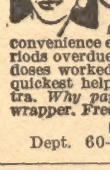

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"About time you showed up to report," Stagg growled. "What's happened?"

Lon sat down. "Plenty. Smithfield invited Mary up to his hacienda last night."

Stagg grinned broadly. "Nice work." He frowned quickly. "But I didn't see anything about it in the papers this morning. You're sure she was at Reggie's?"

"Yeah, because I was there, too!" Lon leaned forward. "Boss, the Smithfield angle is cold. Why? Because the party last night was a real one—to celebrate him getting married to Marylin Montrose!"

"You're nuts! What was Mary doing there if Reggie is getting hitched?"

Lon laughed. "Using that smart little head of hers for something else besides resting on my shoulder. She's talked Reggie into backing a play she wrote that Marylin will be starred in. But cheer up, boss. I've got some hot news about Mary. Besides the play, she's getting married herself in an hour!"

For at least two silent minutes Max Stagg stared at his smiling press agent.

"Who's she getting married to?" he asked finally.

"Me!" Lon answered briefly.

(Solution to puzzle on page 36)

HOW A QUICK, EASY WAY TO LEARN MUSIC

changed my name from "Miss" to "Mrs."

LESS than a year ago I was friendless, lonely, unhappy. Then came the amazing event that changed my whole life.

Here's how it happened!

One evening I was sitting in my lonely room gazing from the window. From across the street came the sound of jazz and happy laughter. I could see couples dancing—others talking—all having a good time.

Everything seemed to center around the girl at the piano—Mary Nelson. How I envied her! She had friends, popularity, happiness—all the things I longed for—*but didn't have.*

The next afternoon I dropped over to see Mary—told her how lonely and depressed I felt. To cheer me up Mary sat down at the piano and played waltzes, jazz bits, sonatas. When she had finished, I sighed enviously.

"Thanks, Mary, it was wonderful. What wouldn't I give to play like that! But it's too late now! I should have had a teacher when I was in school—like you!"

Mary smiled and said: "Ann, I never had a teacher in my life, In fact, not so long ago I couldn't play a note."

"Impossible," I exclaimed. "How did you do it?"

Then she told me about a wonderful new short-cut method of learning music that had been perfected by the U. S. School of Music. You learn real music from the start. When I left Mary it was with new hope. If she could learn to play this way, so could I. That very night I wrote for the Free Book and Demonstration Lesson.

I never dreamed that learning to play the piano could be so simple—even easier than Mary had pictured it. And as the lessons continued, they seemed to get easier. Although I never had any "talent" I was playing my favorites—almost before I knew it.

PICK YOUR INSTRUMENT

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Organ	Clarinet
Ukulele	Flute
Cornet	Saxophone
Trombone	Harp
Piccolo	Mandolin
Guitar	'Cello

Hawaiian Steel Guitar
Trumpet
Piano Accordion
Italian and German Accordion
Voice and Speech Culture
Harmony and Composition
Drums and Traps
Banjo (Plectrum, 5-String or Tenor)

Then came the big night at Margaret Jones' party. What a moment that was when our hostess, apparently troubled, exclaimed: "Isn't it a shame that Mary Nelson can't be here to play the piano."

I spoke up, "I'll try to fill Mary's place—if you're not too critical."

Everyone seemed surprised. "Why, I didn't know she played!" someone behind whispered.

As I struck the first rippling chords of Nevin's lovely "Narcissus," a hush fell over the room. I could hardly believe it, but—I was holding the party spellbound.

When I finished you should have heard them applaud! Everyone insisted I play more! Only too glad, I played piece after piece. Before the evening was over, I had been invited to three more parties. And it wasn't long until I met Tom who shortly afterward asked me to become his wife.

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